



1400 South 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718  
April 20, 2022

To: Interested person

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for a renewal of the reintroduction of trumpeter swans to the Madison Valley of southwest Montana to extend for an additional 5-year period (2022-2026). Swans have been relocated as part of this restoration project since 2012, but for the project to be successful we propose extending relocation efforts for an additional five years. The proposed action is modeled after a successful trumpeter swan reintroduction program in the Blackfoot Valley of Montana as well as similar projects in Montana, Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming. In the Blackfoot, releases of captive-reared trumpeters began in 2005 resulting in nesting by two wild pairs in 2011, reaching a high of seven nesting pairs in 2016, and hopefully reaching project goals in 2022. The Madison program is a smaller effort than the Blackfoot but uses the same methodology.

This project's primary objective is to restore breeding trumpeter swans in this portion of their historic range. While the U.S. portion of the Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeter swans is slowly reaching population level objective, nesting is relatively slow. Therefore, state conservation agencies in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho are increasing efforts to restore these birds to a sustainable level. This proposed restoration would allow MFWP to implement the 2002 Pacific Flyway Council's *Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan (TSIP)* that includes a goal to increase the number of breeding pairs of trumpeter swans in suitable habitats. Releases of trumpeter swans in the middle Madison are expected to result in more trumpeter swans pioneering wetlands throughout the Madison valley where suitable nesting areas are available. Ultimately, these releases are expected to result in establishment of a small breeding flock in the Madison Valley. The proposed project would also Implement the Pacific Flyway Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Management Plan (2017) and the Montana State Wildlife Action Plan (2015). To date, we already have some nesting in the valley from prior released birds, we have pair bonded birds who we anticipate will nest in the coming years. Release birds also act as decoys to attract wild birds to the area, and we have connectivity to other tri-state area projects and to Canada, which is a major goal of the restoration work. We also have community involvement and landowner and private industry participation and support which has been key to the success of this work to date.

We will continue to release birds at the O'Dell Creek Headwaters wetlands south of Ennis, Madison County, Montana, between Quake and Ennis Lakes. O'Dell Creek Headwaters is an extensive wetland, spring creeks, streams, and riparian areas on the east side of the Madison River. The O'Dell Creek

Headwaters has undergone habitat suitability evaluations by MT Natural Heritage Program ecologists as well as biologists from the University of Montana Avian Science Center. Results of these surveys show large increases in breeding waterfowl in the O'Dell Creek Headwaters since restoration began. In addition, the growth of aquatic vegetation to support breeding swans has been determined to be adequate.

Releases would continue annually in August or September of each year when cygnets reach an age of approximately 70-90 days. MFWP would obtain trumpeter swans for release from the Wyoming Wetlands Society facility in Jackson, Wyoming, and continue to seek guidance of restoration success through the Director of the Wyoming Wetlands Society. These birds are of Rocky Mountain Population genetic origin, as outlined in the Pacific Flyway Management Plan. The reintroduction of captive-reared trumpeter swans into suitable nesting areas is a proven management tool in use in other parts of Montana and neighboring states. Releases would continue until five breeding pairs are established in the Madison or until monitoring of the program indicates that the project should be discontinued.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks invites you to comment on the attached proposal. The public comment period will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., May 19, 2022. Comments should be sent to the following:

Claire Gower  
MFWP Native Species Biologist, Region 3  
1400 South 19<sup>th</sup> Ave,  
Bozeman, MT, 59718

Or e-mail to [cgower@mt.gov](mailto:cgower@mt.gov)  
(please title "Middle Madison Trumpeter Swan Restoration Project")

Sincerely,



Marina Yoshioka  
MFWP  
Region 3 Supervisor

Attachment

**Draft  
Environmental Assessment**

**Middle Madison Trumpeter Swan  
Reintroduction**

**Project Renewal 2022-2026**

**April 20, 2022**

# Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

## PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to continue to relocate live trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) from the Wyoming Wetlands Society (WWS) facility in Jackson, Wyoming, into suitable wetland habitats in Montana's Madison Valley. The WWS is currently the only facility that has approved Rocky Mountain Population genetics, approved under the Pacific Flyway Council Management Plan. Swans have been relocated as part of this restoration project since 2012 (2012-2021), and we propose to extend the relocation efforts for an additional five years (2022-2026). The proposed action is modeled after a successful trumpeter swan reintroduction program in the Blackfoot Valley of Montana as well as other similar projects in Montana, Oregon, Idaho, and Wyoming. In the Blackfoot, releases of captive-reared trumpeters began in 2005 resulting in nesting by two wild pairs in 2011 and reaching a high of seven nesting pairs in 2016. The Blackfoot project is hoping to reach project goals of eight nesting pairs in 2022. The Madison program is a much smaller effort than the Blackfoot, releasing a much lower number of birds annually, and releasing cygnets (vs yearlings) but uses the same restoration techniques and aims to reach project accomplishments. The Madison project will take longer to reach project goals, and we believe another five years of releases will help to accomplish these nesting goals.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
3. **Name of project:** Middle Madison Trumpeter Swan Reintroduction – project renewal
4. **Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency):**
5. **Anticipated Schedule:**  
Estimated Date of First Release – approximately 8/25/2022  
Estimated Date of Last Release – approximately 8/25/2026  
Subsequent Releases: annually in late August and September
6. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):**  
Madison County, T7S, R1W, Section 4

7. **Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
Areas		Other	<u>0</u>

8. **Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.**

(a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
Wyoming & Montana Dept.'s of Livestock From Jackson, WY to MT	Permits to transport swans

(b) **Funding:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Northwestern Energy (primary funding source -\$5,000-\$8,000/year ), MT Audubon, Wyoming Wetlands Society. MFWP biologist time and operations only.	

(c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Permit to house trumpeter swans at the Wyoming Wetlands Society facility in Jackson, WY

9. **Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:**

Continue to release captive-reared trumpeter swans to establish a breeding flock of five established nesting pairs in the middle Madison valley of southwest Montana. This work will complement other Pacific Flyway and USFWS endorsed swan restoration projects and will work collaboratively with other state and federal agencies (Idaho Fish and Game, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and the National Park Service), to enhance population growth and connectivity between other tri-state area projects in the Teton Valley, Idaho, and Yellowstone National Park. Additionally, connect to other Montana projects (Blackfoot and Flathead), boost the overall US breeding segment of Trumpeter swans, and provide connectivity to and from the robust Canadian breeding segment. Current trumpeter swan monitoring work

has already demonstrated significant connectivity within and between these US projects and connectivity to Canada.

This proposed restoration would allow FWP to implement the 2002 Pacific Flyway Council's *Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan (TSIP)* that includes a goal to increase the number of breeding pairs of trumpeter swans in suitable habitats. Releases of trumpeter swans in the middle Madison are expected to result in more swans pioneering wetlands throughout the Madison valley where suitable nesting areas are available. Ultimately, these releases are expected to result in establishment of a small breeding flock in the Madison valley. The proposed project would also implement the Pacific Flyway Council's *Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Management Plan* (2017) and the Montana State Wildlife Action Plan (2015).

The proposed release site is the O'Dell Creek Headwaters wetlands south of Ennis, Madison County, Montana, between Quake and Ennis Lakes. O'Dell Creek Headwaters is an extensive wetland, spring creeks, streams, and riparian areas on the east side of the Madison River. The O'Dell Creek Headwaters has undergone habitat suitability evaluations by MT Natural Heritage Program ecologists as well as biologists from the University of Montana Avian Science Center. Results of these surveys show large increases in breeding waterfowl in the O'Dell Creek Headwaters since restoration began. In addition, the growth of aquatic vegetation to support breeding swans has been determined to be adequate to support the proposed released birds.

Birds released in the Madison will have red neck collars and/or red tarsal bands as well as standard metal leg bands which will be used to distinguish individuals and help track their survival and movements. This marking protocol has been approved by the USGS Bird Banding Lab and is compatible with other marking programs for swans in the US. Banding data and subsequent re-observation data will be collected, maintained, and updated periodically by FWP Region 3 personnel. FWP will gather the necessary resources and partner with agencies, conservation organizations, and individuals to monitor breeding swans in the Madison valley. This network of observers and landowners will facilitate transfer of information to FWP to assess progress and success of the program. Swan nesting territories will be monitored to determine nest success, causes of mortality, brood success, and other parameters of productivity that will help guide management decisions and enhance the prospect of success for the program.

Recent collar data, reporting by local citizens and spring nesting flights, indicate there is nesting in the Madison valley with adults and yearling birds being observed in early spring. Numerous observations of pair bonded birds in June indicate that other pairs are at the prime age to set up nesting territories in the valley. Observations of banded birds indicates survival of released birds. Observations from satellited collared birds demonstrates connectivity.

Initial restoration work began in 2012, and ten years of releases have already taken place. This work will be a 5-year extension to the established project. Nesting success in similar projects within the State of Montana (restoration work in the Blackfoot and Flathead valleys which were much larger in scale) have shown that nesting initiates in year 6-8, so we are hopeful that nesting will increase in the proposed time frame. The Madison project has released less birds than the other Montana projects and has release cygnets vs yearlings.

Trumpeter swans do not reach breeding age until about 4-5 years of age, so have taken some years for breeding to start. We believe the additional five years of releases will help to promote additional nesting.

To date, we have seen productivity in the valley, we have survival of released birds, and we are confident that release birds act as decoys to the wetlands and speeds up natural nesting efforts. The project has been welcomed with huge community support and involves state, federal, and private businesses all working together with non-government agencies and landowners throughout the Madison valley. An indirect benefit of the project is monitoring of powerline strike birds and working with Northwestern Energy to mark powerlines to minimize bird mortality in the valley.

MFWP Middle Madison project is one of three state conservation agencies committed to implementing the USFWS Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan as described by the Pacific Flyway Council to address the slow growth (potential decline) in the number of trumpeter swans breeding in SE Idaho, SW Montana, and NW Wyoming. The Madison flock's restoration is central to, and will contribute to, that overall goal.

#### **10. Alternatives:**

**Alternative A: No Action, that is,** to continue to conduct wetland restoration in the Madison and assess whether trumpeter swans from other areas naturally pioneer into the Madison Valley to nest without actively translocating birds from other flocks into the Madison.

**Alternative B: Proposed Action** – Continue with the established project of releasing captive-bred trumpeter swans from Wyoming Wetlands Society facility in Jackson, Wyoming, into suitable habitats in Montana's Madison valley until five established nesting pairs result or until FWP biologists determine that reintroduction is unsuccessful at which time further releases will be discontinued.

## **PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST**

Evaluation of the impacts of the **Proposed Action** including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

### **A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u>	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		x				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		x				
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		x				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		x				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		x				

Wetlands where the swans are proposed to nest are already established so the proposed action will not involve any ground-breaking activities or other impacts on the land resources of the area.

2. <u>AIR</u>	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		x				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		x				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		x				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		x				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		N/A				

No changes to the existing air quality within the Madison Valley are anticipated by this project.

3. <u>WATER</u>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		x				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		x				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		x				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		x				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		x				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		x				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		x				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?			x			
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		x				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		x				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		x				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		N/A				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		N/A				

Trumpeter swans prefer high-quality water in relatively pristine wetlands as their habitats. While droppings from released birds could enter waters where they are introduced, the small number of swans involved represents only a very minor impact. Populations of mallards and other ducks as well as Canada geese already living year-round in the Madison Valley wetlands do not negatively affect the quality of the aquatic environment.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			x			
b. Alteration of a plant community?		x				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		x				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		x				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		x				
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		N/A				

Trumpeter swan feeding will minimally impact aquatic plant communities in the wetlands where they occur. Trumpeter swans feed mostly in shallow waters and eat stems and leaves of aquatic plants growing on the bottom of wetlands. Trumpeters will also dig holes in search of roots and shoots in the bottom of the wetland. However, the number of swans involved in the proposed reintroduction is so small as to make that grazing by swans of negligible effect. Migratory (Canadian) trumpeters already stop and feed in the proposed release area during migratory and wintering periods, graze wetland plants, and have not created any known effect on productivity and abundance of aquatic plant species in these areas.

Although trumpeter swans have been reported to feed in agricultural fields, this has not been observed to occur in the Madison Valley by FWP biologists or others. Additionally, the number of swans involved is so small that even if some feeding in agricultural fields were to occur at some future time, the number of swans involved in that feeding would be few. Most swan feeding in agricultural fields in the Wyoming/Idaho/Montana (Tri-State) Region has been on waste grain left after harvesting operations and has not adversely affected growing crops.

<b>** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE</b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		x				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X			
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		x				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		x				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		x				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		x				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		x				
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		N/A				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		N/A				

Reintroduction of trumpeter swans with the intent to re-establish nesting in the Madison Valley, if successful, could restore one native bird species to Montana's Madison Valley where they have not been found to nest in recent history. The interaction of additional trumpeter swans with other wildlife species in the Madison Valley would be unlikely to cause a negative cumulative effect on any of these wildlife species.

It is the intention of this restoration effort that this breeding flock be migratory, leaving the Madison Valley in winter. Releasing young birds allows birds to become familiar with the environment and promote returning to the same area the following year.

We do not suspect that predation will be a major concern for released trumpeters; especially considering these habitats now offers protected nesting islands and wide areas along the shoreline that offer protected foraging and hiding areas. There is no waterfowl hunting permitted at or adjacent to the release site, so hunters will not pose a threat.

## E. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		x				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		x				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		x				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		x				

No changes to the existing noise levels in the Madison Valley are anticipated by this project.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		x				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		x				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		x				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		x				

The proposed reintroduction of trumpeter swans to the Madison Valley is not expected to impact existing land uses.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		x				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		x				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		x				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		N/A				

No health hazards are expected to be created by the reintroduction of trumpeter swans to the Madison Valley.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		x				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		x				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?			X (+ effect)			
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		x				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		x				

Because birding and its increasing popularity in the U.S. is a growth industry, having nesting trumpeters re-established in the Madison Valley has some potential to interest Madison County residents and visitors to the county to observe/photograph swans. When visitors come from outside of Madison County, some of this travel is to observe nesting swans, swans with young, and birds in general could result in some increase in personal income in Madison County for those involved in the sale of gasoline, food and lodging, and outdoor gear and supplies. Swans are very visible on Ennis lake and other state-owned public viewing areas.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		x				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		x				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		x				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		x				
e. **Define projected revenue sources		N/A				
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						
g. Other:						

If the proposed action is continued, local electric companies in Madison County may need to continue to mark powerlines to attempt to reduce swan mortalities arising from collisions with these lines. However, this is an ongoing activity in Madison County now so the likelihood of a higher degree of line marking is expected to be very minor, i.e., not "substantial".

FWP will gather the necessary resources and partner with individuals and other organizations to continue to monitor swans in the Madison Valley. These efforts will result in a network of observers and landowners in the Madison to facilitate transfer of information to MFWP and its partners to assist in building understanding about the status of the Madison flock. Swan nest territories will be monitored to determine nest success, causes of mortality, brood success, and other parameters of productivity which will help guide decisions about providing nest sites, reducing hazards and other sources of mortality, and enhancing chances for success of the restoration effort. MFWP will continue to work with landowners and the public regarding handling of dead or injured trumpeters. These birds will be collected and necropsied at the appropriate state or federal labs or conveyed to licensed rehab facilities for possible return to the Jackson facility. Because most of the monitoring will be conducted via local landowners and volunteer organizations, we do not foresee using FWP biologists and/or technician time and resources.

<b>** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION</b>  Will the proposed action result in:	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		x				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?			x			
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		N/A				

The sight and sound of trumpeter swans in the Madison Valley will have a minor positive benefit to residents and visitors who encounter these birds. These sights and sounds are already occurring with migrating Canadian trumpeters as well as the occasional spring and summer vagrant swan in the area. Overall, however, public comment received to date regarding the proposed action is that residents and landowners are looking forward to the return of nesting trumpeters to the Madison Valley.

<b>12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</b>  Will the proposed action result in:	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		x				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		x				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		x				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		N/A				

The proposed project would have no impact to existing cultural or historic resources.

## SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>  Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		x				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		x				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		x				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		x				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		x				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		x				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						

The proposed action is not proposed to be a one-time event. MT FWP biologists, as proposed, would be engaged in annual releases for several consecutive years to establish nesting trumpeters in the Madison Valley Funds for the proposed action are being gathered from private sources, so MT FWP is not investing license revenue or other department-generated funding to defray the primary costs of the proposed action.



**Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

None

### **PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT**

Overall, the Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeter swans is doing well. From the last North American Trumpeter swan survey in 2015, the population was about 11,700 white birds but approximately 11,000 of those birds are Canadian breeding flock. The US segment, particularly the tri state (GYE) area, is not growing and, in some years, has shown decline. The goal of this work is to augment the US segment, tri-state population, and hopefully develop connectivity with the larger robust Canadian breeding flock.

The proposed action is modeled after a successful trumpeter swan reintroduction program in the Blackfoot Valley of Montana as well as similar projects in Idaho and Wyoming. In the Blackfoot, releases of captive-reared trumpeters began in 2005 resulting in nesting by two wild pairs in 2011, reaching a high of seven nesting pairs in 2016, and hopefully reaching project goals in 2022. The proposed Madison program is a smaller effort than that in the Blackfoot but is proposed to use the same methodology. We believe an additional five years of releases will booster the Madison swan population and move us towards project goals.

Re-establishment of this native bird to its historic range is in keeping with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' commitment to its ***Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy*** and the ***State Wildlife Action Plan*** which identifies conservation of trumpeter swans and wetlands as first priority activities.

FWP is authorized under the authority granted in 87-1-201 MCA to "spend for the protection, preservation, and propagation of . . . game and nongame birds all state funds collected or acquired for that purpose . . ." FWP's authority to protect, preserve and propagate game and nongame birds is subject to rules and policies that may be adopted by the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission, as described in 87-1-301 MCA.

### **PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

#### **1. Public involvement:**

The public will be notified in the following manner to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices:
- One statewide press release;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

#### **2. Duration of comment period, if any.**

The public comment period ends at 5:00 p.m., May 19, 2022 and can be mailed to the address below:

Claire Gower, FWP Region 3 Wildlife Biologist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
1400 South 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Bozeman, MT 59718  
cgower@mt.gov

## **PART V. EA PREPARATION**

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? No**

**If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment, under MEPA, the proposed action is not a significant action affecting the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not a necessary level of review.

- 2. Person responsible for preparing the EA:**

Claire Gower, FWP Region 3 Wildlife Biologist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
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Bozeman, MT 59718

- 3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Fish and Wildlife Division  
Legal Bureau

## **APPENDICES**

None

